

Molly Mahan
2 April 2009
Shakespeare
Dr. Balizet

All Metropolis's a Stage

In an attempt to be original with staging Shakespeare's work, rather than take the Bard's work word-for-word and place it in either a contemporary or traditional setting or completely deconstruct it (a la *Ten Things I Hate About You* or *My Own Private Idaho*), I instead take his play and place it in a fictional world most of us have some familiarity to varying degrees and with Hollywood's recent influx of comic book hero films, I am further aided in my quest. In my recreation of *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's fantasy world and traditional roles are replaced by DC Comics' Metropolis and the characters popularized in *Superman*. The themes of masked identity, gender roles and love are still present, but, with the change of setting, the more contemporary theme of "women in the workplace" now becomes relevant. The effectiveness of this is best shown in Act III, scene ii, beginning with line 78. Here, Shakespeare's Rosalind, Orlando, Touchstone and Celia are replaced them with Superman, Lois Lane, Perry White and Jimmy Olson. In the original play this scene takes place in the Forest of Arden, however Arden has now become the office building for the *Daily Planet*, a newspaper, in Metropolis.

The scene opens with Superman disguised as mild-mannered reporter "Clark Kent" with the morning edition of today's newspaper. He reads aloud an article detailing the deeds of Superman since his arrival in Metropolis a fortnight ago. He reads the script proudly and with some amusement. "From the east to the western Californian sand, never has there been a man greater than Metropolis's own Superman!" Overhearing him, Perry White, the Chief Editor for the *Daily Planet*, irritably addresses him about the string of articles coming from reporter Lois

Lane's desk. "Clark" apologizes to White and remarks on how plentiful these articles have become since Superman's arrival.

Because none know his true identity, "Clark" refers to Superman in the third person. Furthermore, since "Clark" has not yet met Lois Lane, whom, as Superman, he had saved when she fell out of a helicopter, he requests that he be pointed in her direction so that he might aid her. Before Perry White can respond, Jimmy Olson, a young photographer for the *Daily Planet* who befriended "Clark Kent" earlier in the play, comes in reading another article by Lois Lane marking upon how greatly the city has improved since Superman's arrival. "Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a—Gee, if I could just get a picture of him, surely my name and film credits will be on the map!" noticing his editor's presence, Olson promptly adds, "Not to mention what it'd do for the *Daily Planet!*" Perry White groans at Olson, notes that the *Daily Planet* is the most syndicated paper from Platinum Flats and Gotham City, then exits the stage, claiming he needs to return to his office (115-152). Shortly thereafter, Olson tells "Clark" where he can find Lois; "Clark" thanks him and leaves.

The scene moves across the reporting floor to Lois Lane's cubicle. Rather than reinterpreting Jaques and Orlando's little spat, we see Lois going back and forth with the main purpose of her next article as she is trying her best to keep the topic off of Superman, but she cannot help but be fixated upon the superhero. While trying to abstain from writing on Superman, she begins to think of new names and monikers to call him (248-278). "Something a little less Nietzsche—Man of Steel, perhaps?" As she continues her soliloquy, she fails to notice "Clark's" appearance. He hovers around her work area, pretending to read her article, trying to think of way to address her (282). This may be performed as Superman acting nervous to put

such mannerisms upon the “Clark Kent” persona, or him actually being nervous that she might see passed his *brilliant* disguise of thick framed glasses.

It isn't until she picks up her head to look for a dictionary that she even regards his presence. She stares at him for a moment and asks if she has met him before, something about his countenance is familiar. “Do you always wear glasses,” she asks him. “Clark” lowers his head sheepishly and tells her he is new in town and has just transferred to the *Planet* from a sister-paper in Smallville, Kansas and he'd be as blind as a bat, were he to be without his glasses. She scoffs and tells him he must learn to keep up with the pace of the big city as time seems to move slower in the country; she also notes his accent and encourages that he try to drop it (283-319). He does not refute this, but instead turns the conversation towards her newspaper articles. “Clark” mocks all the powers and abilities Superman is proclaimed to have (320-327). When she tries to rebut him, he argues further against vigilantism and adds, “Not to mention that hideous costume. He looks as if he is flying around in his underwear and flamboyantly so in primary colors!” She huffs at him and returns to her work. After a beat, he asks if she is the one who has been fawning over Superman in all her articles. At first, Lois tries to deny her infatuation with the Man of Steel, as she so eloquently refers to him in one of her articles, but after coaxing from “Clark” (332-355) she admits that she is indeed in love with him and that the sickness brought upon by this love has begun to affect her work and she wishes it to go away. “Clark” says he can help her with this by role playing as Superman for her. She will learn through this act that her so beloved “demigod” is not as exciting and attractive as her mind idealizes him to be. At first she laughs and mocks the notion, and then she rethinks the idea and accepts (373-399):

SUPERMAN (*as Clark Kent*): You're a reporter: we could set it up as an interview. I'll pretend to be this “Superman” character—big red “S” and all—answering your questions to the best as my ability and acting as much the fool and

egotist I am sure he is, so that you might get over your love fantasy and return to your work.

LOIS: Do you think this will work? Have you tried something like this before?

SUPERMAN: Once back in Smallville there was this girl named Lana Lang who was in love with some boy she claimed to be just as heroic and special as your “Superman.” After a week or so she was over it.

LOIS: I’m not some silly teenage girl!

SUPERMAN: You *weren’t* some silly girl. From the direction your writing has turned to since our new “hero’s” appearance, I wouldn’t say so with such certainty anymore. Now, don’t get upset! Even if I cannot cure you of your love, I will at the very least ensure that your work does not suffer from your Cupid’s arrows.

Using characters that are already well known due to pop culture, allows for the audience to both be familiar and unfamiliar with the scene. Depending on the interpretation of this scene, one may assume that Lois Lane (Orlando) is either completely unaware that Clark Kent (Ganymede) is, in fact, Superman (Rosalind) or that it is completely obvious to her that they are one and the same. If we take it to understand that she knows it is Superman, her playing along proves her love by playing not blurting out his secret identity. The reaction to “Clark’s” suggestion of pretending to be Superman would also change depending on if she knew it was him or not. If she acts reluctant at first or disinterested in anything he has to say, it is obvious, then that she doesn’t know it is him. If, instead, she is eager and attentive to him outside of the role play, then it is evident that she knows his identity and cares only to spend more time with him.

Further, under both premises, we see her trying to function in the workplace and not be overwhelmed by her love for the most physically powerful creature in Metropolis. We may also read that, unlike Rosalind, Superman is not necessarily testing her love—after all, it would be

hard not to love someone who saves the world regularly out of goodness—but instead wants her to succeed in her field and have control over her heart and mind. It is the mentality of a teenage girl to be completely infatuated by a possible suitor and to forget herself and her responsibilities, but not that of a woman and it is made evident that her writing is suffering by comments made by both Perry White and “Clark” because of her infatuation with Superman. Such themes could not be unraveled in Shakespeare’s original play, due to the constraints of culture; however, given the new time and place, the female lead no longer has to give up everything to her suitor when she becomes his wife, as it is for Rosalind in the play, so the theme love plays instead allows for Lois to succeed in the workplace, rather than give it all up to be Mrs. Superman.